DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 060 653 EM 009 699

AUTHOR	Ross, Samuel B., Jr.
TITLE	The Learning Disabled as a Creative Individual.
INSTITUTION	Green Chimneys School, Brewster, N. Y.
PUB DATE	Feb 72
NOTE	8p.; Paper presented at the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Audiovisual Aids; Creative Activities; Learning Disabilities; Photography; *Student Improvement; *Underachievers; *Visual Literacy

ABSTRACT

A visual literacy program may be helpful in reaching the "learning disabled" (youngsters of average or above average intelligence who are not achieving on or above grade level). To carry out a good visual literacy program it is necessary to have many kinds of arts and crafts materials, a supply of newspapers and magazines in a learning resource center, cameras and darkroom equipment, typewriters, and tape recorders. Many "Show and Tell" activities related to all areas of study are possible with this equipment. Students who participate in these activities display a great deal of patience, discipline, and motivation. The activities also bring forth students' creativity and bring about a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. As a result, students develop a better self-image and more interest in traditional education. Most important, they enjoy what they are doing. (JK)

ED 060653

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

THE LEARNING DISABLED AS A CREATIVE INDIVIDUAL.

Address - A C L D

in

Atlantic City

February, 1972

by

Samuel B. Ross, Jr., Headmaster
Green Chimneys School
Brewster, New York 10509 and

Director of Program Development
Edwin Gould Foundation for Children
126 East 31st Street
New York, N.Y. 10016

EM 009699

The Learning Disabled as a Creative Individual

In preparing any paper to be read or discussed by a multi-disciplinary audience, one has first to recognize that "problems in terminology arise when two different disciplines attempt a common description of the child".[1] In order to avoid this I would like to establish my definition of learning disabled as it applies to this discussion. By learning disabled, I mean those youngsters who are of average or above average intelligence who are not achieving on or above grade level. As an educator I see my task as one of helping youngsters reach their potential.

In accepting the challenge of helping youngsters who have exhibited numerous school and social problems, I feel one should accept the fact that youngsters can use multiple talents to acquire knowledge. It is up to us to recognize and understand the causes of educational failure among students with academic potential but it is more important however, for us to recognize the need to do something about it.

How then can we best develop a program which will meet the needs of our students while not sacrificing what we have come to believe to be important and basic and without doing any harm to any of our pupils? I would like to suggest that we adopt a visualliteracy model. Visual literacy, according to the Conference on Visual Literacy, the national body which has been formed to study, explore and disseminate information on this concept, refers to modes of visual communication and their application. In the classroom such an approach

---

[1] Minimal Brain Dysfunction - National Project on Learning Disabilities In Children - Public Health Service Publication No. 2015 - 1969, pg. 1.

calls for an active learner involved in multi-sensory activities. It implies multi-media opportunities for the student. It requires flexibility by the teacher and administration. It demands recognition that there is no one way material needs to be presented. It respects the individuality of the pupil and sees his performance as a personal thing and his output as original and creative. It defies those who claim that activity or a highly stimulated classroom will contribute to distractability and hyperactivity. It challenges the critics of education who have found school to be boring or oppressive. But better still, it does no harm to the learner and can, in fact, help the child to find a place for himself in the school community and concomitantly in his home.

Too often the theorist proposes valid ideas which if practiced would certainly prove valuable and helpful but they are not attempted because of the lack of a clear-cut approach for the classroom teacher to take. It is, therefore, incumbent on us all to be as precise as possible when making suggestions so that they can be introduced. In order not to repeat this error I will now attempt to be as specific as possible about the happenings in my own school and in others where I have seen visual literacy activities being carried out.

First of all, what equipment must one have? To carry out a good visual literacy program it is necessary to have as many kinds of arts and crafts materials as one can possibly accumulate. This affords the student the opportunity of preparing various models, posters, dioramas or displays as may be necessary to present the subject material adequately. It is important to have magazines and newspapers available and a librarian who creates of the library, a learning resource center. Even though the emphasis is visual, one does not overlook the need for verbal material. One form complements

the other. It is oftimes the motivating force to strengthen the other. Copying, mounting and projection equipment of all types is essential. Cameras and darkroom equipment are definitely ingredients which need to be included. The cost factor whereas important, need not be a deterrent. There is available equipment to fit anyone's budget; even the most deprived. The tape recorder is another tool which must be available. Typewriters help too. Television for viewing and closed-circuit equipment adds to the expansiveness of the offering the child may choose from. The shirt cardboards become marvelous cue cards. Then there are maps, travel posters, charts, science equipment, tape measures, compasses, and many other items which currently are available in the school but are too often overlooked or limited for use by the faculty and not permitted the student. It's one big Show and Tell experience for the entire school and every grade level, in every class and in every subject. In terms of benefit and overall purpose, it provides the student with a varied approach and innumerable inputs and it enables the teacher to reach each child by allowing him the freedom of preparing material in varying modes.

As example, Indian headdresses were used to implant the letter "I". Experience charts have always been important to younger children but they work with older ones as well. Phonics charts, sandpaper letters, movement exploration, and a large mirror have meaning to this concept. An oilcloth mural in the middle grades created with the overhead projector and paper cut-outs served as a daily activity for a 40 day trip we took to Europe. This was reinforced by a class made accordion book which served as a permanent diary of the trip. Squares on the board as seen through the lens of a camera at varied distances helped develop measurement concepts. Body forms of pupils covered with magazine cut-outs vividly portrayed elements in the environment understood, felt or

experienced by students. An actual photograph of the face and head served to identify its owner. A map of the explorations of New Spain reinforced by letters baked in the oven, implanted facts in the minds of upper elementary school youngsters. Similarly mobiles serve the same purpose and are appropriate at all levels. Ecology posters, photographs of field trips, magazine pictures combined with artwork, poetry and prose form excellent posters and a good basis for a presentation. Photographs serve as good starters for conversation or compositions. They are excellent clues for endings too. Pictures help to bring out meaning for they serve as proper referents for the pupil. Sequencing can be taught through use of commercially prepared Photo Discovery Sets or through groups of self-made photographs. Sometimes just one word can tell an entire story. Picture *dead* repeated over and over again on a paper but each time slanted to create the impression and feeling one gets from witnessing someone falling over. Perhaps it's the name of someone from history illustrated in what we call worded images.

James Cass in his recent Saturday Review editorial, Pressures for Change (Nov. 20, 1971), makes the point that "We have, for example, been called a nation of visual illiterates - not least because we have rarely placed the same value on the ability to communicate in the visual and performing arts that we have placed on the ability to communicate in the languages of mathematics or physics". We have experienced many exciting moments as a result of our visiting artists program. At various times we've had a poet, a book illustrator, and a cartoonist working with our youngsters. There have been musical groups, dancers, little theatre groups and outstanding films. There have been frequent student productions too.

Visual literacy doesn't have to be the one and only approach. It is an integral part. In terms of environmental education it emphasizes and answers the question posed by our national anthem - "Oh say can you see?" It permits

a careful study of trees or animal life. Sometimes a student does it by carefully observing trees at various periods of growth as seen on our campus or it can be done from a ladder or roof top looking down on trees and tree trunks. The study of a stream as it flows through the property makes for an interesting report. Sometimes the study can have more than one meaning. We've come to be able to recognize the diagnostic information which is revealed by continuing the knowledge we have of a pupil with the pictures he takes. We've come to learn and understand that we don't all perceive the same thing from the experiences we encounter. An illustration of this can be understood from two short statements made by students after a dog show:

> "The Dog Show had over 300 people. Imagine how many dogs were there. It was fun. I made friends with a lot of dogs. It was a big mad house. The whole school got a can of soda. In one field there were dogs that do what their masters do. Some dogs do their commands on body signals. On the other field a lady was selling bones, cages and other dog things.....
> We had a Dog Show last Sunday. It was awful. The only thing that was good was getting a soda. The place was full of dogs. All the dogs went to the bathroom. We had to clean up and the visitors made the mess."

We can understand those who have studied the field of non-verbal communication for it's fascinating to see how students can create an entire essay in visual form and be clearly understood. For those who remember the sequence of the Italian policeman on Candid Camera, you can appreciate what I mean. We've studied commercials too. There are many possibilities here for English, economics, health, science and social studies. The discards are available from television stations, local industries and ad agencies.

But what about the student? How does he react to all this? Is this just so much play that he can't tackle a serious assignment? Does he always have to have all this back up equipment in order to do any work? Of course not.

No one would even want to suggest that each student will want to participate in any or all of these activities. Nevertheless, this kind of a program should be made available to all students regardless of the diagnosis, the kind of school or the age of the pupil. The reaction will be different in each situation. We can predict a number of things which may happen.

First of all, the observer will be amazed at the degree of patience students will show as they begin working on these projects. The same youngsters who time and time again have displayed lack of control, the need for immediate gratification and the inability to work with others, seem to be able to tolerate much more when they are deeply involved. Youngsters plan visual presentations with much preciseness and painstakingly arrange for each element of the report. This is indeed reason enough to encourage these activities.

Then one will become immediately impressed with the creative ability of most youngsters. Much of this is never evident in a sit in your seat - don't do this or that atmosphere. It has a multiplier effect in a school. It seems to relax student and teacher alike. It seems to awaken all of the hidden talents we possess and yet have never been able to show. It opens new possibilities to the child who has experienced failure time and time again. In some cases it may well provide a clue to the vocational niche this person should fill.

Such a school program will increase the possibility of returning youngsters to the mainstream of education. Fortified with their own increased self-concept, with an expanded environmental awareness and with new tools for communication, they are better able to withstand the pressures evident in any school program. For the youngster burdened with a series of medical, educational and social problems, it can serve to relieve him of the unnecessary problems which will make him more acceptable and more able to make his way in life.

Were there time, I could explore with you how the faculty of my school wrote an entire curriculum which became an integrated activity program which served for 40 days this summer under the guise of a summer trip to Europe. Imagine, however, the experiences we were able to make available to our students beginning with the act of filling out a passport application, to costumes, foods of foreign countries, film study or athletic events. Then, too, I could discuss our cemetery project which lead to transforming an abandoned cemetery, to a service in a church which had fallen into disuse, to community recognition for the effort and to a feeling of pride for all those who participated. To exclude mention of our farm program and our environmental activities would be to forget a major part of my own program. Work becomes imbedded in the minds of the youngsters and one's labor is understood and appreciated by us all.

In summary, it is well for us to remember what we have been exploring. I've attempted here to describe a program which merits consideration in any school. It is when thoroughly investigated and probed nothing more than good teaching practice. It recognizes the worth of each individual. It emphasizes the resultant good which can occur when teacher and pupil are actively involved in the learning process. It presupposes that the teacher and the administration will permit the kinds of active program that may be required. It requires,too, an understanding that most standardized tests will not provide for the knowledge gained through such an approach but then what does it matter for the learning disabled has been doing poorly on tests up to this point anyway. His new outlook, his increased interest and his obvious growth in many areas may show on tests but I can't guarantee it. I believe it nevertheless merits your attention for it may be the only time in your career when you will ever see youngsters expressing pleasure in what before they described in terms which may not be uttered in public or placed in print.